

ABSTRACT-- Academy of Culture & Technology; Pomona, Calif.

The Academy of Culture and Technology (ACT) will serve approximately 200 K-8 students living within the southwest portion of the City of Pomona (City is located 30 miles east of Los Angeles and has a population of 150,000). Current enrollment figures for the six elementary schools surrounding the ACT site show the demographic make-up to be approximately 85% Latino, with Black, white and Asian categories evenly dividing the remainder of the population count. Over 90% of these students qualify for free/ reduced price meals, with approximately 40% of these students coming from households receiving AFDC. The City also consistently leads the east Los Angeles County area in unemployment, violent crimes, youth gang affiliation, per cent of the adult population with less than eight years of education, etc.

Pomona schools as a whole tend to score just below the Los Angeles County median test scores in reading, writing and math for 4th and 8th grade students. However, when we look at the six elementary schools and two junior high schools that surround our proposed site, we find that these scores dip as low as 30% of the Pomona median, with most of these schools scoring at roughly 50 to 75% of the Pomona district-wide scores for reading, writing and mathematics. These schools, therefore, have the dubious distinction of ranking among the State of California's poorest performers.

ACT embodies a very different approach to developing the minds of a mainly low-income, Latino, student body. Within this context, it is absolutely essential that we begin by posing a central question: "What is the purpose of education within socially and economically impacted communities like Pomona?" ACT envisions creating a learning model that combines features from some well known educational philosophies. ACT emphasizes the need to develop advanced academic skills in math, science and English (reading, writing and language use). Equally important is the development of a broad content knowledge so that students may understand their place in the context of world historical development. Finally, from a philosophy emanating from a social change perspective, the notion of students as dynamic agents of change emphasizes the need for students to learn how things and processes work, and how they can help transform conditions around them through their accumulation of knowledge.

The charter developer, the Pomona Valley Center for Community Development (PVCCD), is one of the principal community based organizations that has served the neighborhood for the past six years and is based on the site where the new school-- a former parochial school that had served the neighborhood for over 50 years-- will open in September, 1999. Central to the PVCCD's organizational philosophy is the notion of people and neighborhoods organizing themselves to create positive change. The charter school is, in itself, an effort to transform local institutions that have become seriously out of touch with our youth's basic needs.

The PVCCD is committed to the development of the ACT charter school and is seeking capacity building funds to help construct the various processes leading to a charter school's opening. This California State Department of Education planning grant opportunity would allow the PVCCD the ability to hire one full-time project coordinator to help organize these processes. The project manager will oversee the activities of a collaborative that includes Cal Poly University, Claremont Graduate School, the PVCCD and business planning consultants, in the design of curriculum and operational plans to open the ACT school in September, 1999.

I. Student Profile: Area Demographic Characteristics/ Performance Levels

A survey of the six elementary schools surrounding our proposed site (the southwest quadrant of the City of Pomona) that serve about six thousand pupils reveals some distinct demographic indicators. Within a City that had an official 1990 Census count of 50.5% Hispanic population, the most recent school enrollment figures for the above mentioned sites show student ethnic breakdown to be roughly: 85% Hispanic, 6% Asian, 4% Black and 4% white. Of these students, about 65% were classified as Limited-English Proficient. Over 90% of these students qualify for free/ reduced price meals, with approximately 40% of these students coming from households receiving AFDC. Clearly, these are demographic characteristics resembling other similarly depressed urban areas of California. The City also consistently leads the east Los Angeles County area in unemployment, violent crimes, youth gang affiliation, per cent of the adult population with less than eight years of education, etc.

California Learning Assessment Systems test scores show that the Pomona Unified School District as a whole scores just below the Los Angeles County median test scores in reading, writing and math for 4th and 8th grade students. However, when we look at the six elementary schools and two junior high schools that surround our proposed site, we find that these scores dip as low as 30% of the Pomona median, with most of these schools scoring at roughly 50 to 75% of the Pomona district-wide scores for reading, writing and mathematics. These schools, therefore, have the dubious distinction of ranking among the State of California's poorest performers.

II. A VISION FOR OUR CHILDREN

The Academy of Culture and Technology (ACT) is an important experiment in pedagogy that seeks to redefine what a school is. The school will serve K-8 students primarily living within the southern portion of the City of Pomona. Within this context, it is absolutely essential that we begin by positing a central question: "What is the purpose of education within socially and economically impacted communities like Pomona?" It is a commonly enunciated critique within our community that the educational system is merely warehousing our children until they are old enough to transition into the ranks of the working poor. In essence, the current purpose of our local education structure appears to be to reproduce the existing environmental conditions that beset us in the first place. Communities like Pomona are caught within a vicious circle.

ACT embodies a very different approach to developing the minds of a mainly low-income, Latino, student body. First and foremost, the ACT charter school represents the fundamental notion of a community being empowered to take responsibility for its own children. The charter developer, the Pomona Valley Center for Community Development (PVCCD), is one of the principal community based organizations that has served the neighborhood for the past six years and is based on the site where the new school will open in September, 1999.

Central to the PVCCD's organizational philosophy is the notion of people and neighborhoods organizing themselves to create positive change. The charter school is, in itself, an effort to transform local institutions that have become seriously out of touch with our youth's basic needs.

ACT operates from a much different premise regarding what effective education needs to be. A school, within our specific context, must be a living organism that is created to help transform our youth into cultured, conscious and responsible individuals, who, in turn, become the concrete catalyst to transform the impacted society that exists around them. ACT will redefine what a school, within this specific demographic context, should be. Most every aspect of its being will function in contrast to the existing elementary schools that are within blocks of this site. For instance: the school will be a safe haven for its' children, opening at 6:30 each morning and staying open until late in the evening when courses are offered for the parents. The school not only will provide a much improved learning environment, but it will also deliver an array of social services and resources at the site to help develop students, parents and extended community.

The ACT school has some vary ambitious learning objectives for its' students which will require the expansion of the school day and school year; it will not be unusual to see learning activities conducted on weekends and during the summer months.

Curriculum

The ACT school will develop a holistic model for creating a new environment that encourages academic excellence. The school has a goal of creating cultured and technologically competent students who will be able to compete with the best of their peers later on in high school, college and beyond. The physical classroom will be altered so that teachers will lecturer to an entire class for only portions of the day. The remainder of the time, classrooms will be divided into learning groups where a portion of students, for instance, are working on computers on one side of the class, another group works on a hands-on project related to the curriculum, while another set of students does research. The curriculum itself will reflect the school's fundamental commitment to having students develop advanced competency in mathematics and science, and mastery of the English language. Taking the lead from teacher Jaime Escalante who got poor Latino students in East Los Angeles to achieve excellence in calculus, our curriculum's goal will be to achieve excellence in Math, Science and English by all means possible: ACT will become synonymous with excellence in these subjects.

Secondly, the ACT curriculum will be imbued with elements that develop social and moral guidance, artistic expression and critical thinking. Students will develop their talents to become cultured, world citizens who take responsibility for their selves and their surroundings.

Finally, all students will have a grasp of the technological environment in a way that few schools in the area currently have. Computers will form the nucleus of this understanding, but only as a beginning point. ACT students will have a proficiency for using the computer to create, for instance, web sites, publications, video productions, and software applications. The computer will become a day to day tool accessible to all students in their individual and class endeavors. The computer will also be well integrated into self-paced learning modules that advance a student's competency in math, science and English.

The Teacher

The role of the teacher will be transformed from someone who dispenses information to one of a project manager who guides individualized learning plans that steer students to academic excellence. So much of the school's success will depend on its' teachers adopting the school's vision and becoming active entities toward fulfilling the vision. Teachers will cease to be

professional employees and evolve to become creative designers and managers of the learning and managerial processes guiding the school.

ACT teachers are project managers in the sense that they are guiding the individual learning plans of each and every student toward excellence. This job requires that they develop clear and regular communications with the parent and student who are responsible for carrying out this plan. It is the teacher that is the community's daily barometer in assessing whether our plans are on the right track or whether readjustments to the plan must be made.

ACT will also greatly expand the pool of teachers for the school by tapping into a plethora of sources. Local residents, for instance, will be used to develop students' foreign language skills, do craft projects and learn urban-agriculture: the talents of our neighborhood residents will be used to teach our children. In addition, partnerships with Cal Poly University and the Claremont Graduate School will provide the school with student interns and technical assistance to guide the school through all the components of its development.

ACT Students

The ACT student will be distinctly recognizable within the community as the school develops and succeeds. The ACT student epitomizes the love for education; the student is eager to get to school each and every day to be part of the diverse learning environment. It is this eagerness that helps propel the school and its' vision forward.

The basis for this eagerness is two fold: the student is thoroughly enthralled in the diverse learning environment that ACT provides; and, the school environment is a constant reminder to the student that their personal development and wellbeing is the community's priority.

Parents

Parents of ACT students will be required to adopt the school's commitment to excellence and learning, demonstrated through their own actions in assisting in their child's overall academic, moral and civic development. The parent's own personal development will be a priority of the school, for it is one of the most effective paths to developing the students.

Governance

ACT is a community expression of its collective aspiration for its' children. The school will be governed by persons that represent these aspirations, whether it be teachers, parents or community members at-large.

Philosophical Base for the Vision

Act envisions creating a learning model that combines features from some well known educational philosophies. From the Coalition of Essential Schools focus, we do emphasize the need to develop advanced academic skills in math, science and English (reading, writing and language use). From the Core Knowledge Sequence perspective, ACT emphasizes the development of broad content knowledge so that students may understand their place in the context of world historical development. Finally, from a philosophy emanating from our own social change organization, the notion of students as dynamic agents of change emphasizes the need for students to learn how things and processes work, and how they can help transform things around them through their accumulation of knowledge.

Specific Educational Objectives To Be Achieved

ACT will create a learning environment that has three main objectives: assist students in developing advanced skills in math, science and English; provide students with a broad knowledge to assist them in understanding the reality around them; and, create cultured and responsible human beings.

Summary of Charter School's Anticipated Achievements

ACT will provide poor, formerly low achieving students living in the Pomona area with a world class education that will prepare them to compete in the world economy. The school will also create cultured and responsible members of society, equipped with the talents to improve their surrounding society.

III. Grant Project Goals

The planning grant will be used to concretely develop the vision of an advanced charter school. The charter developer is the Pomona Valley Center for Community Development, which will use the planning grant funds to hire a Project Coordinator. The Project Coordinator will oversee all the processes that are required to open the new charter school to students in September, 1999.

Principal processes and tasks involve:

- Coordinate the interaction between the PVCCD, Cal Poly School of Education and the Claremont Graduate School Teacher Preparation Program in designing the curriculum to be used in grades K-8. This task also requires that the evaluation systems and procedures are created that can verify the community goal of effective pedagogy while also measuring student performance through traditional testing methods that are mandated by the state.
- Create the community organizing initiatives that will inform and involve residents, parents, future students and potential teaching staff in the actual development of the charter plan and operations. This initiative will culminate in the development of the charter school governing structure and also steer the charter proposal through the required approval process.
- Insure that the charter document, to be prepared by PVCCD staff, does indeed include proactive input from the local community, from educational collaborators (Cal Poly School of Education and the Claremont Graduate School), the local business sector and all other interested parties.
- Oversee PVCCD grant writing efforts to secure funds for equipment, computer labs, library facilities, building re-habilitation and upgrades, and the initial start-up funds required for general operations of the school.
- Insure that the PVCCD expands its current fiscal and organizational management system to meet the needs of the newly established charter school. This includes the development of all policies and procedures for the charter school operation, including personnel policies and evaluation methods.

Identification of Planning Needs:

The charter developer, the PVCCD, is, primarily, an agent of community social change and development. While the organization provides ESL-Citizenship courses to hundreds of immigrant adults and computer literacy programming for youth and adults, it is entering a new arena when engaging in the technical questions and vernacular associated with operating a K-8

charter school. Our desire is to create an environment that can allow our children to thrive academically in order that they may compete within our global society. This is the standard that the charter school hopes to achieve: the planning process will be used to create collaborative relationships with area youth, parents, educators and educational institutions in order to assemble all of the various building blocks required to build a structure that can meet our objectives.

1. Development of Educational Capacity

How does one plan for the achievement of excellence in math, science and English, inspire a broad content knowledge and prepare students to become agents of change within their own neighborhoods? The ACT charter effort will spend the next year planning how such a learning environment will be created for poor, under-achieving students.

To attain such objectives, our planning efforts will focus around the development of a collaborative that involves the Cal Poly School of Education, Claremont Graduate School Teacher Preparation Program and the P.V.C.C.D. staff. This collaborative will begin by exploring what is currently available in the way of curriculum and instructional methodologies, and whether such an approach meets the specific learning needs of our children. This process will include identifying the methods that are currently being used by successful charter schools and adjust these to our children's needs.

In our final stage, the collaborative will adopt a k-8 curriculum and select the associated materials to be used that will support the ambitious outcomes set forth by ACT.

Measurements & Evaluation of Progress

The ACT effort is certain about its capacity to make a significant difference within our children's educational achievement, and it is our desire to be able to measure and prove these results in the most effective manner that is possible. Just as importantly, ACT wants to be able to assess how effectively the curriculum and school environment is in helping to transform each individual student into a cultured and responsible citizen within the community.

Standardized Testing & Evaluation Required By The State

The ACT effort is all about creating innovative approaches toward inspiring academic achievement. We do believe that our methods will demonstrate marked improvement in academic performance, and this will be borne out in the test measures that are traditionally used by state and local institutions to measure such performance. During the planning process, ACT will review the most recent state Department of Education mandates for testing and evaluation, and determine how these mandates will be implemented. A timeline and procedure for implementing these mandates will also be developed during the planning grant period.

ACT Contextual Evaluation of Student, Class & School Performance

Our school is about creating processes that will transform our youth into cultured, conscious and responsible individuals, who, in turn, become the concrete catalyst to transform the impacted society that exists around them. How do we measure an expansion of consciousness, culture and responsibility? ACT will need to an individualized assessment method that can measure a student's growth during the school year and over the passage of several school years. A portfolio system of some sort will probably provide for the basis for this method. Again, the collaborative will review existing assessment methods and refine an approach that is applicable to our

potential student body. This method must be sensitive to the role of the teacher who oversees this process, the student subject and the parent involved.

Professional Development

The ACT effort portends some very lofty goals which can only be approached if there is a real synergistic relationship that exists among the school personnel. This relationship must seek to become 'seamless', so that teachers feel comfortable managing and managers feel comfortable designing processes with teachers. Even non-teaching staff, parents and students must be made to feel that they have tremendous validity in the day to day operations and improvements of the school. Our planning process will work to create processes that will encourage all personnel to take the initiative and to lead.

The planning grant period will work to create structures that enhance teacher and staff initiative. Teachers and staff need to be given the opportunity to create new curriculum, develop group teaching methods and group evaluation methods to help propel the school forward. The charter school needs to provide expanded opportunities for teachers' professional growth through workshops, seminars and team building sessions.

2. Expansion of Business & Organizational Capacity

The charter developer, PVCCD, begins this process with an advantage of having run various levels of educational and social service programming for the past six years since having been incorporated as a non-profit, tax exempt corporation. Central to this process has been the organization's philosophy that a non-profit is, in its essence, a business venture that is run by the community: while being an organization that exemplifies community empowerment and change, this venture must be well planned, financed and accountable in order to survive.

The main task facing the ACT school will be to develop an economy of scale that expands PVCCD's current business and organizational capacity. The organization, to various degrees, already performs many of the processes required by a sound charter school business plan: a fiscal and accounting system is in place that does payroll for one-dozen employees and produces all budget and expenditure reports involved in managing various grant funded programs that have total expenditures of about \$200,000.

The ACT planning process will insure that the PVCCD expands its current fiscal and organizational management system to meet the needs of the newly established charter school. This includes the development of all policies and procedures for the charter school operation, including personnel policies and evaluation methods.

The PVCCD will turn to the local Small Business Development Center to assist in the overall business strategic plan. Consultants from the center will be used to oversee existing and proposed expansion of our fiscal system. Early on in the planning process, the PVCCD will develop the first year's operating budget and then use this document as a roadmap for the school's future. This document will be scrutinized by accountants and experts within the school management sector and the budget will become a principal document within the planning process used to identify critical policy issues and spending priorities. During the planning process, we will also begin a 'walk through' of annual audit procedures, working with accounting personnel to understand the key requirements toward achieving a satisfactory audit.

The planning process will also be a time to research and structure teacher/ staff compensation, along with retirement, health and other benefit plans. Other issues such as contracting out of

services and the hiring of consultants will be evaluated in context of the budget to determine the school's options. Finally, important financial questions regarding ADA and categorical funding and the fiscal relationship of the school to the school district will need to be explored and reflected within a revised budget process.

3. Collaboration & Networking Strategies

The charter developer, the PVCCD, as previously mentioned, is an agent of social change in the surrounding community. Central to focus is a consistent commitment to community organizing campaigns, leadership development programming and various outreach efforts that have been conducted over the past six years. The organization has, therefore, developed long term relationships with local residents and institutions (educational, local government, businesses, etc.) that will be essential to the school's development.

The planning process will be used to create the community organizing initiatives that will inform and involve residents, parents, future students and potential teaching staff in the actual development of the charter plan and operations. These plans will seek to develop structures that encourage and enhance students, parents and community members to become leaders within the school.

This process will culminate in the development of the charter school governing structure, which must create a structure that is inclusive, open and fosters initiative from the school community, yet disciplined and centered on the learning and management objectives at hand.

4. Overall Program Evaluation

The planning process will construct the means to assess whether the school achieves its objectives on various fronts. Academically, we need to be certain that our students are meeting the mark as defined by state standards and by the broader based community standards underlying the ACT program. Structures must be created that empowers the school community to be able to constantly reflect on the effectiveness of the learning environment. Throughout the school year, two central questions need to be posited and properly addressed: are our students achieving according to state standards, and are our students growing by the community standards that ACT sets forth.

Fiscally, our business plan must develop methods to verify the school's economic viability along with the adequacy of the accounting standards that oversee day to day operations. The planning period will be used to develop precise ways of insuring fiscal accountability.

The planning process also needs to develop measures to assess the human development of our teachers, staff, parents, students and community volunteers.

IV. Circulation and Approval of Charter Petition

This process begins with the community organizing initiative that will be launched early on in the planning period. The community must be mobilized to support the concept and subsequent efforts to establish a community run school. Community input will be actively sought to develop the charter document, and community support will be one of the key elements that will be relied upon to get the charter school approved by the Local Educational Agency.

V. Justification for Use of Grant Funds

The PVCCD is committed to the development of the ACT charter school and is seeking capacity building funds to help construct the various processes leading to a charter school's opening. This California State Department of Education planning grant opportunity would allow the PVCCD the opportunity to hire one full-time project coordinator to help organize these processes. The project manager will include coordinating the activities of the collaborative that designs the curriculum to be used in grades K-8, creating community organizing initiatives to help produce and approve the charter, oversee PVCCD grant writing efforts, insure that the PVCCD expands its current fiscal and organizational management system to meet the needs of the newly established charter school.

Evaluation Of Planning Process & Charter Approval Effort

The charter developer, the PVCCD, has considerable experience administering grant funded projects, including planning and capacity building efforts. It will be the responsibility of the PVCCD executive director to monitor the day to day progress of the charter school's project coordinator. Upon hiring of this person, timelines will be drawn up for the completion of each major task, including charter proposal and business operations plan. Once these plans have been drafted, the PVCCD executive director and school project coordinator will circulate these documents within the collaborative of entities assisting this effort.

The executive director will convene an evaluation meeting on a quarterly basis that will include the project coordinator and the collaborative members most familiar with the requirements of the planning project. These quarterly meetings will review the quality of the various products being worked on such as the charter document, the curriculum plan and the business operations plan, to insure that they meet the standards set forth by the planning grant sponsors and the charter school vision.